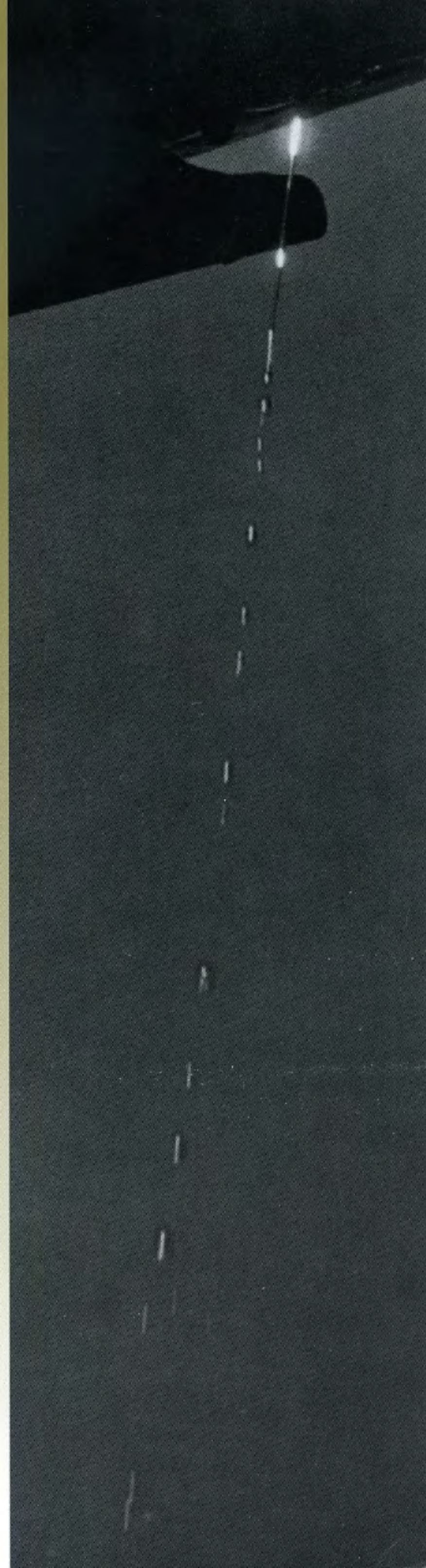
Glimpses of SHUNYATA

VIDYADHARA THE VENERABLE CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA, RINPOCHE



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Talk One

Open Space of Shunyata

THIS SEMINAR is on shunyata, although we are quite uncertain what shunyata actually is. It seems that shunyata means not that, not this. So we shouldn't have a discussion at all. If it's not that, not this—what else? We could sit around and scrounge up something to discuss, but it seems to be insignificant, totally irrelevant.

The expectation to hear about shunyata is an obstacle,- the shunyata principle does not lie in the expectation. We might get into the idea of what shunyata means: *shunya* means "empty"; *ta* means "ness," so *shunyata* means "emptiness." It is vaguely connected with the idea of the attainment of enlightenment. The idea of the attainment of enlightenment is based on ignorance, which is the opposite of enlightenment. So if you accept shunyata, you have to accept ignorance and enlightenment

simultaneously. Therefore the shunyata principle is accepting the language of samsara as the language of enlightenment. When we talk about aggression, passion and confusion, that automatically is the language of shunyata: Aggression as opposed to what? Passion as opposed to what? Ignorance as opposed to what? That kind of open space is related with the shunyata principle.

What we are trying to achieve with this particular seminar is to understand shunyata as such—that does not exist because of this, this does not exist because of that. We expect some concrete answer, something definite, something solid, but solidity itself depends on frivolousness, so to speak. Shunyata as opposed to the natural situation, or things as they are, seems to be a very important point to work with. The idea of shunyata depends on what is not shunyata—which is based on ego's manifestation.

We would like an ego manifestation of solidity: "I would like to understand that, I would like to comprehend that, I would like to attain enlightenment." So the idea of shunyata is based on the ambition to understand what shunyata is. If you are willing to give away that basic ambition, then shunyata seems to be there already. Therefore the shunyata principle is not dependent on that or this, it is based on transcending dualistic perceptions—and at the same time dwelling on dualistic ideas. The mantra of shunyata is OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA, which means "Gone, gone, gone beyond, that which is related to basic enlightenment mind is the essence of everything."

As far as shunyata goes, that you decided to come and take part in this particular seminar is futile. You might meet with disappointment in that this seminar does not

say what is or what isn't. And you cannot get your money's worth. In other words, you can't get your money back. Oh, no! You expect too much. You're not going to be refunded. It's *your* hang-up, expecting too much out of shunyata, which means nothing! But it means everything at the same time.

We could have a discussion if you like. Please.

STUDENT: You mean to say our money is gone, gone, gone— [Laughter]

VIDYADHARA: Somewhat.

S: What's the relationship between shunyata and prajnaparamita?

V: Shunyata is the subject that prajnaparamita perceives.

S: Is it still a dual situation?

V: Shunyata? Sure.

S: I thought you said it transcended dualism.

V: Nonshunyata. Nonemptiness.

S: I'm not sure I quite understand how shunyata can now be dual, because I thought you said shunyata transcended dualism.

V: Shunyata is, in this case, nondwelling. But nondwelling in itself means dwelling on nondwelling. So we have to transcend shunyata from that point of view.

S: That's like saying not-two is one. But in previous seminars not-two is not-one, not-two—just the way things are. So nondwelling is not necessarily dwelling.

V: In previous seminars two is not one, in terms of meaning. But in this case, *one* is not one. [Laughter]

[Long pause]

S: Well, why was the subject of shunyata ever brought up? [Laughter] Mentioning it seems to add something to the situation.
V: Because the subject of shunyata is there already.
S: I never thought of it! I never thought of shunyata. [Laughter]
V: Because of that, because you haven't thought of it, therefore it is there already. It happens.
S: You mean the absence of that thought itself is emptiness?
V: Yeah, somewhat.

S: What do you think we should discuss tomorrow in our discussion period?
V: Shunyata. [Laughter]

S: Is it prajna that is negating? Is it prajna saying not-this?
V: Not necessarily. You see, the whole point is that there is something worth exploring—and having explored the whole thing we discover nothing. But it's not worth it not to explore either, because things are so. [Vidyadhara snaps fan shut] CATE, GATE, PARAGATE, PARASAM-GATE, BODHI SVAHA.
S: Gone *safely* beyond, right?
V: No!
S: In my translation of *The Heart Sutra* it says, "Gone, gone, gone safely beyond."
V: Safely?! [Laughter]
S: "Safely beyond," yeah.
V: Must have been translated on Madison Avenue. [Laughter]

S: I doubt it.

V: Possibly.

S: So how do you translate it?

V: "Gone, gone, gone beyond, no security saves you whatever." *Para* means, "beyond," like the idea of parapsychology, it means "beyond concept," "gone, gone, gone beyond the idea of gone beyond",- *sam* means "complete",- *gate* means "gone." Simple.

S: There's a translation that reads, "gone *fully* beyond." Would you say that's a good one?

V: You don't need that kind of adjective [laughter]—because it is so! Black is black, white is white! So what, after that? It's as obvious as that.

S: If prajna cuts through duality, is that an action which evolves into shunyata? Does the operation itself still remain after that?

V: It seems that if you think it is involved, it is so; whereas if you don't think it is involved it does not exist. It is purely up to your expectations. Quite simple. It is purely up to you. The teaching depends on you. In other words, samsara depends on nirvana and nirvana depends on samsara.

S: What I was trying to get at is that there seems to be something that remains after shunyata, because you said that after shunyata you get nonshunyata.

V: That's up to you.

S: Excuse me?

V: That's up to you.

S: That's just a view?

V: Up to you, up to you! It depends on you! It doesn't have to be that way. If you want some security, it always happens that way.

S: There's a statement that emptiness is form and form is emptiness. Is there a progressive relationship between the two?

V: I don't think so, because they are defeating each other. The statements defeat each other. Emptiness is form, therefore form is emptiness—they are defeating each other all the time, destroying the previous statement successively. So you have nothing to dwell on at all. Black is white, white is black. The statements defeat each other all the time, so you don't have anything to dwell on anymore at all. That's it.

S: But the dwelling still exists, although faintly.

V: Doesn't exist.

S: It doesn't exist?

V: Because you are already busted. [Laughter]

S: As well as absorbed into nirvana.

V: I don't know about nirvana.

S: Whatever, yeah.

S: Is there a relationship to skillful means?

V: That is skillful means!

S: Shunyata *is* skillful means?

V: Yes.

S: Then how come in the symbolism you have a symbol for each?

V: I've never seen a symbol for each.

S: I was under the impression that the dorje, or the thunderbolt, was symbolic of skillful means and the bell

was symbolic of shunyata and that Dorje Chang holds both of them, and that they're joined together.

V: So what?

S: That is why I was asking you, so what?

V: I don't know. I have no idea! [Laughter] I don't understand about that!

S: Neither do I.

V: I don't know!

S: What is the stage after shunyata?

V: I don't know! [Laughter]

S: Does anyone?

V: Your guess is as good as mine. I really don't know! [Laughter]

S: There are all sorts of practices, like mahamudra, that come after the shunyata experience.

V: I don't know.

S: Who knows?

V: Nobody! I really don't know!

S: Is it possible to be absorbed in shunyata materialistically, spiritually materialistically?

V: It is possible, definitely, yes. If you think you have grasped shunyata, you've been absorbed into it as a sedative, which is very dangerous. But beyond that there is no danger. So it is quite possible.

S: To be absorbed into it as a sedative?

V: Yes.

S: Could you explain what you mean by that?

V: Sedative! Quite simple.

S: To use it as a sedative you would have to *think* you've grasped shunyata.

V: Sure.

S: Which means you really haven't?

V: That's right. [Laughter] You are quite right. Well said!

S: Is the sedative quality related to the fact that shunyata experience accompanies the idea of giving up expectations, but that giving up expectations is a hang-up?

V: Yes.

S: So the sedative quality comes from the fact that you've given everything up —

V: That you have some technique to do it. Technique is a sedative, as it usually is.

S: Is it possible for the responses visualized through the tantras to be faster as a result of the breakthrough beyond duality?

V: It's possible, yes.

S: Is it spontaneity?

V: I think so. Spontaneity become hang-up.

S: Is the technique holding in or putting more out?

V: Both. It depends on the person.

S: Does shunyata mean not hesitation, or is it just a concept?

V: It seems to be both. The idea of shunyata is a concept. You understand it to begin with, then you

begin to dwell on it. That could be the cause of hang-ups, or further concepts.

S: So it is a concept to begin with.

V: Yes.

S: So we don't exist without any hang-up.

V: It could be a hang-up, because there was a concept at the beginning that sent a message down to the underworld of security. It could become a hang-up, or problem, because you have something to hang onto as a handle.

S: Would you have thoughts?

V: Well, that's a problem—

S: But would you be one with the thoughts?

V: —because the whole thing is one with your thoughts. The concept of shunyata is involved with your thoughts,-therefore the whole thing becomes a hang-up. Thoughts are usually concerned with what is not directed to you and what is directed to you; there is hope and fear as to what is for you, what is not for you. Constant fear or hope is involved.

S: Well, I meant thoughts in the sense that if you have a retinocyclograph machine, whenever a light flashes into your eyes, usually there is a corresponding thought, a certain kind of mental registration.

V: They're the same thing. That is thought.

S: Right. I'm just trying to think about if in shunyata you'd still have that kind of thought process.

V: I don't think so. In shunyata, these particular details are not involved—aggression or passion or accuracy or whatever. In shunyata, the whole idea of thought is

things as they are, which is not dependent on logical proof. It transcends proof.

S: Is that a state of total awareness?

V: Somewhat.

S: You talked about the idea of shunyata as being a sedative, but could it be that shunyata is an antidote to suffering in the dark? Would it then be the same kind of sedative?

V: I don't think so. Shunyata looks at the definite quality of pain—pain as pain, pleasure as pleasure. It can be quite simple.

S: But if it's the actual empty nature of pain—I mean, isn't pain something that we think of as solid?

V: No, in shunyata experience you don't see the empty nature of pain at all. Pain is pain in its own existence because form is form and emptiness is emptiness. It sees its own identity as such a definite thing, constantly.

S: So it just acknowledges?

V: Feels it and acknowledges it as it is.

S: I was wondering, as a result of the relationship of subject and object, or observer and observed, you have a sort of duality set up. When duality is destroyed, does the observer become one with the observed or do the observer and the observed both in a sense vanish?

V: That's right, yes.

S: Vanish into one.

V: Yes.

S: But it's not sequential, that the observed disappears and the observer doesn't, but the two simultaneously?

V: Neither would it be nonsequential, the observer and what is observed.

S: Yeah. In other words discontinuity becomes continuous.

V: Yes.

S: Good.

V: Somewhat.

S: Why only somewhat?

V: Why not? [Laughter]

S: Every time you say *somewhat* there's the idea that we miss something.

V: Beyond doubt.

S: Beyond a doubt? Then you should not say *somewhat,* you should say *precisely!*

V: No. You could say *somewhat.* You have stretched over all areas, therefore you are imperial, you are the master of the whole situation. Therefore *somewhat*! [Laughter] When you say *precise*, you become a little businessman. *Somewhat. If you say something*—that's different. When you say *somewhat,* you have preserved your whole thing.

S: You mean when you say *somewhat* it's more than just a little point but —

V: Precisely, yes. [Much laughter]

I think we should close this meeting tonight. We could have a discussion period tomorrow and some sitting practice as well. And we could discuss further what is known as shunyata—what *is* shunyata.

Thank you for coming.

Talk Two

Ground

I SUPPOSE WE HAVE TO SEE the basic principle of shunyata in terms of practice and theory. In terms of theory, all kinds of philosophical speculations about shunyata could be discussed. But in terms of practice, how does a person perceive the shunyata principle in terms of the practical experience of daily living? The sense of shunyata is what we are discussing rather than the philosophy of shunyata. The sense of shunyata—what is it all about? Shunyata simply means emptiness, nothingness. But there is something more than that. When we talk about emptiness, that automatically means the absence of fullness. So we have to get into what is full and what makes it empty.

There are three principles of shunyata: emptiness as ground, emptiness as path, emptiness as fruition. As far as emptiness as ground is concerned: before we begin on

the path, there is no beginning. So one doesn't begin on the path as a solid path, as one imagines, but by realizing and understanding that the basic ground is so—without searching particularly or trying to capture the experience of the ground as a starting point.

The starting point itself, the basic ground of shunyata or emptiness, is that one has to know a sense of no beginner. In other words, a complete understanding of egolessness is the starting point. Without that there is no understanding of shunyata. So you have no solid ground to work with or to walk on. That is to say, you are not going to liberate yourself in order to attain enlightenment. You have to give up the notion of liberation at the beginning—and that also applies to the shunyata principle.

Shunyata, or emptiness, is empty of subject-object relationship. Nonexistent subject, nonexistent object. Perceiver and perceptions do not exist. As far as the groundwork is concerned, there is no definite ground. As long as there is definite ground on the spiritual quest, it becomes a struggle, a deliberate attitude of achievement. And once we begin to be aware of our process of searching as an ambitious struggle, that struggle automatically becomes a formulated struggle, a struggle with ideas, a struggle with theology, concept, which is perpetually creating samsaric mind rather than the spiritual path. The spiritual path becomes religion from that point of view, pejoratively speaking.

So the shunyata experience seems to be that which frees us from religiosity and leads us to true spirituality. Religion in this sense is dogma. You are already a bad person, a condemned person, you contain all kinds of wickedness and you should take those faults and

problems seriously. You should try to get into a reformation process or if you can't do that, you should take a vow and promise to somebody: "At whatever cost it might take, I won't do it again. It won't happen, I can assure you. I promise not to be naughty any more. From today onward I'll be good. I'm ashamed of what I was, but at the same time I am proud of what I might be in the future." Some kind of primitive positive thinking.

The shunyata principle has an entirely different perspective and feel to the whole thing. We do not think that we are naughty or being bad or that we are condemned. But that doesn't mean that we forget all about it. Instead we accept at the same time the destructive qualities in our basic mechanism as well as the positive qualities in our mechanism, so we have no ground to have a battle at all. In other words, the shunyata principle is a clear principle in which at the beginning, as far as the ground work of shunyata is concerned, no battleground is provided—good fighting evil, evil fighting good, and so forth. It is free of all territories. Both good and bad could coexist. We are acknowledging that process but not regarding it as a defeat—or a promise, for that matter. In other words, dualistic mind has become confused. As soon as dualistic mind exists on the basic ground, it has to fight or to make love, it has to define enemy and friend. It cannot exist without all of those. So the shunyata perspective shows us a new dimension: in order to exist we don't have to fight anymore and we don't have to grasp anymore at all.

It is a very powerful thing that we could *be* by doing nothing. In fact we be by not being. We could be by not being—that is the basic ground of shunyata. Struggle does not play an important part in order to exist. In other

words we could live without breathing. It sounds illogical: we can't live without breathing, can we? But somehow the definition of existence is that nonexistence could exist,- therefore it is existence. Nonexistence could exist,- therefore the samsaric process goes on and alogical things could happen, such eccentric ideas as shunyata could exist in the world. Absolute nonsensical! Doesn't make any sense. How could I exist without fighting? How could I exist without grasping? Does that mean I should not eat food and I should not defend myself from dangers? One might ask that question. The answer is, Yes! You don't have to consume projections in order to exist and you don't have to fight projections in order to exist either, metaphorically speaking.

There is a ground process in which we could accommodate everything that goes on without making a big deal out of it—the ground shunyata principle, the absence of hope and fear. We don't have to strategize further ways of maintaining ourselves or existing ourselves at all. This is negating the existence of that; having negated the existence of that, therefore that automatically negates the existence of this at the same time. The ground shunyata principle. You could say that is the experience of freedom, being ultimately free. We do not have to associate ourselves with good or evil. It is true spirituality, positive thinking: good is good in its own way, unconditioned good; bad is bad in its own way, unconditioned bad,- and both could coexist on the basic ground.

That ground shunyata principle starts the inspiration for the practice of meditation. Any formal practice of meditation could be said to be that nondualistic approach, equilibrium in its fullest sense. You provide

ground, acknowledge the ground with certain techniques that have been presented to you. The techniques themselves are also expressions of that unbiased approach. They do not express or suggest struggle at all. The techniques are just existing, such as working with breathing, working with walking. Existing, working with existence, is the technique.

So the ground of the shunyata principle is basically uncolored by dogma or by concept. It is not philosophizing the whole thing but actually doing it, being involved in a process that is without dogma. The basic principle of shunyata, of seeing beyond dualistic process, goes on from that. One wonders what else is left with the path and the goal. That whole approach of the groundwork seems to be the path and the goal. But we will discuss them later. It is amazing that we can make something out of nothing!

Questions?

STUDENT: There's an experience that people call a shunyata experience—that's a term—would you use that term yourself?

VIDYADHARA: Yes, somewhat.

S: Could you please explain how that is related to what you call clear light experience?

V: I think we are going to go through that in tonight's talk and tomorrow's talk.

S: Maybe I could ask you one more. The shunyata experience has a terrifying quality to it —

V: Definitely, yes.

S: —to people who are into their egos. [Laughter] As you are getting into that experience, it has a sort of stark,

barren feeling to it. If you were prepared to get into that experience, would that feeling instead get into a singing, musical sort of quality? I don't know if that's right. In other words, where the familiar boundaries begin to dissolve, if you're prepared to accept that experience, it sort of goes into a dance or musical quality.

V: Well, it is obviously a terrifying prospect that you cannot have ground to struggle with, that all the ground is being taken away from you. The carpet is pulled out from under your feet. You are suspended in nowhere—which generally happens anyway, whether we acknowledge it as it actually happens or not. Once we begin to be involved with some understanding, or evolve ourselves towards understanding the meaning of life or of spirituality, we have no further reinforcement—nothing but just being captivated that something is not quite right, something is missing somewhere.

You have to give in somewhere, somewhat—unless you begin to physically maintain that particular religious trip by successive chantings, pujas and ritual ceremonies. Or you may try to organize that spiritual scene administratively—answering telephones, writing letters, conducting tours of the community. Then you feel that you are doing something. Otherwise, there is no ground to relate with, none whatsoever—if you are really dealing with the naked body as an individuality, an individual person who is getting into the practice of a spiritual way. Even with a person's obligations, administrative work, or liturgical job within the spiritual scene, he or she has nothing left on the spiritual way.

You seem to regard your basic existence to be related with spirituality as a definite thing. By maintaining it through primitive language you feel you have ground.

But when the primitive language is removed from your relation to spirituality, you have nothing to relate with anymore at all. Terrifying! You have lost the whole ground. One is thrown back to the practice then, and the practice is very alien, spooky. "Does that mean that I cannot give a tour explaining to people the meaning behind this particular spiritual scene? Does that mean that I cannot conduct ceremonies, services, or perform holy sacraments?" There is the sense that your badges and your uniform have been taken away from you. It is not that this process could take place only if somebody took them away from you officially and formally. But halfway through, you begin to realize that your uniform does not really answer questions and it does not really mean anything as such at all. You are suspended in nowhere. That's the shunyata experience. No ground to walk on, no ground to work with. You have no function.

From that point of view, the idea of the bodhisattva's work, compassionate work, also could be regarded as an occupation. If you regard yourself as a professional bodhisattva, suddenly you realize that you can't be involved with the professionalism of a bodhisattva anymore. So the whole thing is completely wiped out. Your existence has no meaning because you want to be a bodhisattva but you find that you can't be a bodhisattva. Your practice of the six paramitas is removed from your face, completely wiped out.

So what to do next—Scream? Commit suicide? Attack what? Rage war? Once you begin to wage war against something, you know that the war will end one day. So that doesn't seem to be a permanent, secure occupation either. [Laughter] Somebody has to win or lose. Particularly if you don't want to win, you win. So the

whole process is very scary. You could say that it is a dance, if you like. I'm afraid it is not a particularly musical one. [Laughter]

S: What is the relation of wanting to the ground, wanting in itself, not wanting any particular thing but just wanting. You say that I don't have to fight, but I want to fight, I *want.* And this obscures the ground. The wanting goes on, wanting in itself.

V: Well, the whole point is that if you want, that means that you are afraid of being without an occupation. You want something because you haven't got it.

S: I want!

V: Because you haven't got it.

S: I have wanted! I want!

V: Yes, but you can't want unless you don't have it.

S: Unless I don't have wanting.

V: Unless you don't have whatever you want, and therefore you want. That means you are standing on nothingness. Do you see what I mean? For instance, what if you say that I want to go to the moon?

S: I don't want any specific thing, I just want. I have wanting.

V: Well, that's the whole thing.

S: That attaches itself, the wanting attaches itself.

V: It means basically you haven't got it.

S: Right. Now, I don't want to want shunyata, because I won't have it if I want it. And I don't want the ground, because if I want it I won't have the ground. I'm asking, how can I get rid of wanting without *wanting* to get rid of wanting?

V: Well, I suppose the whole point is that you have to acknowledge your double poverty. You are poor and you realize that because you are poor therefore you are poor. Because there is space, therefore you know there is space. *Realizing* space is another matter. But the realizer also realizes there is no space and there is also space. It is threatening, extremely threatening. In other words, you see something, but you are not really seeing. From this point of view the shunyata principle is extraordinary. It sounds demonic or negative, extraordinarily negative. Unless we acknowledge that negativity of poverty and loss of ground, we cannot relate to the shunyata principle.

S: The problem is that wanting is incorporated into the emotional system. It's almost automatic. It's in the emotions! And it doesn't go away because I see all this.

V: No, but if you see that it is hopeless, then you don't try to strategize any more. You give up the whole trip. It's not a question of realizing that you could stop wanting, which means you are still hanging onto something. You see what I mean?

S: Yeah, but the habit system is also built in there, the habit around the wanting. So if we let some stimulus appear, any kind, that emotion and habit will go right to work in the moment, right? So this is the problem, to dissolve that.

V: Well, you don't have to dissolve it. Just dwell on the problem and problem itself will begin to become hopelessness [laughter] which can't be saved. You can't be saved.

S: I'm not trying to be saved.

V: That's the whole problem. [Laughter] Unless you realize you can't be saved —

S: Oh, I *can't* be saved. Different point.

V: —there's no other way. It is the hopelessness of the situation.

S: Is it possible to look at wanting as an expression of the ground?

V: It is the ground of something— it's more of a platform than the ground. [Laughter] It is *something* undoubtedly, but it's not the ground.

S: Rinpoche, saying that sounds very cold, is there any warmth at all?

V: Well —

S: Well? [Laughter]

V: Unless you experience the coldness, you can't experience warmth, can you?

S: True.

V: By logic.

S: Then the fact that you're cold indicates that there is warmth.

V: Your ability to experience warmth is heightened by experiencing cold, or the coolness. As far as the ground of shunyata is concerned, there is no warmth. It is an unkind world, uncompassionate, ruthless. I think you have to give up hope, it's a hopeless situation. When we discuss the path, that is the starting point of warmth, which we will get into next time. That's true. It's cold, it's not very kind. [Vidyadhara snaps fan]

S: I just wondered if this is a process, if you have to keep going beyond this point over and over again, or if you just go beyond?

V: I think you have to go through it over and over again.

S: You go as far as you've gone before and then you can do so automatically, over and over.

V: Yes. And once you begin, you cannot help taking some steps.

S: When a person is having this experience, does he or she become really cold in his relationships? Would it be natural for a person having this experience to become cold in their relationships?

V: I wouldn't say so. That sounds like we are discussing the path. We are discussing the starting point.

S: Well, what would one's psychological state be?

V: One's psychological experience is that there is no room to maneuver about or to strategize anymore. It's a hard fact.

S: Sounds like a dank hole.

V: It is like a vajra. The vajra represents truth and shunyata at the same time. It is indestructible, a hard fact, indestructible fact. The sense should be harder than the words. It's the uncompassionate truth.

S: Then one would see one's environment as being uncompassionate also.

V: Well, the environment depends on you. It's your environment. There's no independent environment as such at all.

S: Well, this is true. But you come down to this coldness, which is internal, right?

V: Interna], yes, undoubtedly.

S: And yet the external situation remains. I mean there are people and communities and gurus and wives and the whole stuff. That doesn't go away. I mean there's still

stuff to relate to and you're viewing it with this coldness inside.
V: Probably the communities and gurus will enforce that coldness. They might say to you that you have no hope. You're a hopeless case. "Much as I love you, I'm afraid you're a hopeless case." [Laughter] "Much as I'm your spiritual friend,—" [Laughter]

S: With all this talking about hopelessness and giving up your uniform and not being able to conduct another tour, I keep going back to the experience of death. Is that at all comparable to shunyata in the sense that there's an equilibrium between life and death in which life is death?
V: That seems to be the whole process.
S: One which all of us will go through collectively.
V: Yes. The only security of any kind, if there is security, is discontinuity. It is the only security there is. In other words, hopelessness is the security. Hopelessness is the ground. Continual hopelessness is the ground, continual shunyata is the only ground. This could be said to be the hinayanist point of view of shunyata, but it is still valid at the beginning.

S: If total awareness of shunyata exists, can there still be action?
V: Shunyata exists on reaction, comparison. Shunyata is emptiness. Therefore it constantly exists on, thrives on, existence as opposed to nonexistence. Shunyata is still experience. It is not an absolute state at all.
S: What kind of experience?
V: Shunyata is an experience.

S: But can one act out of that experience?

V: One cannot help it.

S: Rinpoche, can you describe the inspiration to see what you see?

V: In what context?

S: Say in meditation, or just in general.

V: There's inspiration. At the same time, disappointment becomes inspiration. In that sense, that something is not seen is the beginning of seeing. For instance, if you are studying music, the starting point is to realize how unmusical you are. If you are studying art, the starting point is to realize how inartistic you are. That's a hopeful situation. That you have the intelligence to see how inartistic or how unmusical you are is the starting point. Hopelessness is the starting point. That is extremely powerful actually, and the most positive thought that you could have. It is an extraordinarily positive thing to discover how bad things are. [Laughter]

S: Why do you say that this would be great? What if after you actually discover how bad you are, you start deciding that you're not so great? Isn't there a danger of developing paranoia, becoming more and more paranoid about yourself?

V: I think that's the starting point. You can't be intelligent unless you are paranoid. I mean [the Buddha's teachings] begin with the Four Noble Truths rather than the attainment of enlightenment. The first thing the Buddha said was that there is nothing but suffering, which could be said to be a slightly paranoid remark to make. [Laughter] Probably we would prefer

enlightenment. He didn't say that it is a beautiful world, he said the world consists of pain, misery and suffering. That's a very intelligent remark to make, extremely positive.

S: The first thing the Buddha said was, "Wonder of wonders, all beings are intended to be buddhas." If one had that experience, would one maintain faith in that?

V: I think so, yes.

S: So it's not totally hopeless.

V: But we have to be careful not to make a double twist.

S: Let's just take it as it is.

V: Yes, but let's not interpret.

S: Yeah, but nonetheless, even if the ground is gone [Gong is rung]—I am what I am and nothing can change that, right? That seems to be a basically stable —

V: No, I wouldn't say that, I would say the opposite: I am *not* what I am, and for that reason it can happen. [Laughter]

S: I can't be anything else.

V: Hmm?

S: I can't be anything other than I am.

V: You can. You could go through the impermanence of what you are.

S: Let's go back to the Battle of Ego seminar [laughter] where you described the basic ground that ego is built on as stable.

V: Somewhat.

S: In its stability is an all-rightness, is there not?

V: I think you are stretching too much. Elastic band.

S: It's a desperate situation. [Laughter]

V: I sympathize with you on that. [Laughter]

S: Considering the power of saying how bad things are, what kind of power could it be to use human good as an index?

V: How about goodness, do you mean?

S: In other words, you spoke of the power of feeling bad—not feeling bad but realizing how bad things are. Where is the index, which I often use, of feeling good? In other words, going in the direction that feels good, let's say, and using that as an index.

V: Well, to begin with, can you tell me what your idea of good is? A definition, so to speak?

S: It's when I feel loose and relaxed and not confused and clear.

V: Not confused and clear. That's reasonable. [Laughter] That's reasonable! But that's the whole starting point, you see. If you see how bad you are, you are not confused. You see *precisely* how bad you are! [Laughter]

S: I don't feel good.

V: Somewhat. [Laughter] You feel definitely, anyway.

S: Did you say that the advantage of hopelessness is to accelerate the receptivity? If I have nothing to hold onto, including hope, that might make me more receptive to what is going to happen. No attachment.

V: Can you restate that?

S: Yes. If I have a hope, that will blind me to what's happening around me.

V: Yes.

S: If I have no hope, that means I can react intuitively and completely to whatever happens.

V: Well, to reach the low point of hopelessness, you have to have hope and then it becomes hopelessness, rather than that you are completely wiped out at the beginning.

S: It's not a negative statement, the way I see it.

V: Well, you have to have a positive thing, to be hopeful, to begin with. Then you lose your hope. It's a question of nothingness and blankness—you see what I mean?

S: No.

V: Hope is based on hopelessness,- hopelessness depends on hope. To begin with you have a drive to be hopeful, you struggle all the time. Then you lose that hope, you begin to come to the conclusion of hopelessness. Whereas if there is no hope at all in the beginning, there's no fertile ground.

S: So that's a condition?

V: Somewhat, yes. It's an interaction of some kind. If you say you have one eye, that automatically presumes that usually people have two eyes and you happen to have one eye. It is a logical process.

S: Or you have *at least* one eye—you may have another one I don't know about.

V: And so forth.

S: What's the difference between the hopelessness that people may feel before shunyata and the hopelessness that they feel after? There are a lot of people who feel very hopeless about their situation.

V: We could say that the hopelessness of their situation before shunyata, as you call it, is shunyata experience already. There is room to work with because we feel hopeless. That is shunyata experience already. It is

giving up that and this. You are completely lost, you don't know how to fight or how to grasp. You feel completely helpless, hopeless. That seems to be the starting point of shunyata experience. We could say that is shunyata experience, in fact.

S: What happens after that?

V: We experience the hopelessness of it and then we begin to experience warmth in that negativity. We are going to discuss that later on.

S: Is it that you start meditation with the hope that you are going to get somewhere or do something for yourself, and you realize on the way that there is no such thing. Is that the hopelessness?

V: Realizing that meditation is not going to save you, but you have to work on yourself. That is the idea of hopelessness.

S: How do you work on yourself other than by meditation?

V: Nothing.

S: Nothing.

S: [Another student chimes in] Nothing.

V: That encompasses a lot of areas: meditation and meditation in action. But without that there is no other way.

S: Rinpoche, when you see the hopelessness and futility of the whole spiritual trip and of meditation, if you keep meditating anyway wouldn't that indicate that you still have hope? I mean there's nothing out there, you know, it's futile, so why do it? If you see how futile it is and

then you continue to do it, it's like beating your head against the wall.

V: In this case you appreciate doing nothing but just being, which is the epitome of hopelessness. [Laughter] That brings compassion and enlightenment.

S: I think I read it or you said it, but what we call meditation in the beginning isn't really meditation, it's just playing. After this hopelessness we really start something with our meditation.

V: Yes. The whole idea of the mechanistic approach is, "Before I do that, I'm going to get there." You have to give up that approach as well.

S: If the hopelessness comes out in the body, as a feeling of wanting to throw up and terrible anxiety and your stomach going wild and you feel like you might lose your mind—if the hopelessness comes out in that way is that because we are doing something wrong, that we are taking the wrong approach?

V: Psychologically struggling too much.

S: Sometimes I feel the way he just described, maybe differently day by day, going too fast or feeling close to a certain kind of pain. And it'll come time to meditate or I will be in my bed meditating and I notice that after I meditate for an hour I feel better. Out of that experience I can't help having some feeling about meditation, or attitude towards it, that it is salvation or that it is at least a momentary release of something. Is that a good way to think about meditation or to connect those two? I don't know if I'm making that up or anything.

V: Well, in a primitive practice you might use meditation as a temporary service, temporary salvation, but in the absolute sense that doesn't apply any more. Meditation means giving up hope altogether. You just sit and do it.

S: I don't enter it with the hope that I'll be released from some hang-up I've been feeling, but it just so happens that I feel a lot better in terms of tiring and confusion and feeling my body much looser.

V: I think that is a misunderstanding. In terms of feeling that certain ways of doing things might help you, there's still a sense of therapeutic practice. Meditation is not therapeutic practice at all. We seem to have a problem in this country, with the sense that meditation is included with psychotherapy or physiotherapy or whatever. A lot of Buddhists feel proud because meditation is accepted as part of the therapeutic system, a landmark of the western world. But I think that pride is simple-minded pride. Buddhism should transcend the therapeutic practice of meditation. Relating with gurus is quite different from going to your psychiatrist.

S: But out of that experience I'm afraid of falling into the trap of getting too involved in the therapeutic aspect, because it does in fact dissolve pain. I mean, that is an experience that I have.

V: You shouldn't dissolve pain.

S: You shouldn't?

V: You should raise pain! [Laughter] Otherwise you don't know who you are or what you are. Meditation is a way of opening. In that particular process, under-hidden subconscious things come up, so you could view yourself as who you are. It is an unpeeling, unmasking process.

S: How is that related to freedom?

V: Because there is a sense not of collecting but of an undoing process. You don't collect further substances that bind you or further responsibilities. It is a freedom process.

S: There's a tendency for people to come forth with a specific psychological problem and to have somebody say, "Well, why don't you meditate?" But from the point of view you just expressed that would be inappropriate and of no particular help.

V: It depends on how you meditate. It depends on your attitude to meditation.

S: For example, a meditation like zen meditation or meditation as you've been describing it today has this quality of hopelessness. That seemed to teach me that it wouldn't be appropriate to tell somebody to do it in order to try to help them with their problem.

V: I think it would. To help with their problem is to bring the problem onto the surface.

S: Isn't that the same as therapy?

V: I don't think so. We don't talk about curing.

S: Therapy does make things surface.

V: No it doesn't, actually. It is reputed to do so, but somehow you become a professional confessioner so you know what language to use. In meditation there is no language involved at all. The whole practice is not involved with language, but just doing it.

S: But you do talk to yourself in meditation.

V: So what?

S: So it uses a language.

V: You don't try to get involved with proving yourself to somebody else, which is a much heavier trip. Moreover you don't pay yourself a salary, or fees. [Laughter]

S: Does feeling pain have anything to do with feeling uncomfortable?

V: Comfortable is pain, yeah.

S: Comfortable is pain?

V: Comfort brings pain.

S: Comfort brings pain?

V: Mm-hmm.

S: Well, when you feel uncomfortable —

V: —that brings pleasure. [Laughter]

S: Sounds like masochists.

V: I wouldn't say that either,- then you defeat your purpose.

S: Masochists find pleasure from pain, same thing.

V: I don't think so.

S: You mean they are different?

V: Because you are relating with what you are, pre-masochists.

S: Does this hopelessness rise out of seeing that you have never been able to establish anything in your mind or keep it there?

V: Hopelessness seems to come up because you can't cheat yourself anymore. You can't con yourself anymore. You can't con the situation and you can't cheat anybody in that given situation anymore. Therefore you feel helpless and hopeless.

S: You are not consciously attempting to con somebody or other.

V: No. Psychologically it's built in already. There's a tendency to provide as much personal comfort as possible.

S: What is your feeling about the original Sufi system, in the thirteenth century?

V: What system?

S: The Sufi mystical system of whirling dervishes, in which they use a process called [fana?] incorporating dance, music and singing. They approach this tremendous despair and hopelessness and then gain some sort of enlightenment and become illuminated. What do you think about that?

V: Is that so? [Laughter]

S: I don't know. I'm just wondering if that kind of system might develop here in the western world. It reduces your ego presumably, but it's accompanied by music and dancing.

V: It doesn't have to be the Sufi system, particularly.

S: Yeah, I know, that's what I mean.

V: They provide their own means once they are awakened, once they are opened. If you are trying to court certain practices of such a tradition, it is not particularly helpful. People could develop, and seemingly they are already developing, a way of communicating with themselves which leads to ways of loosening up. They provide all kinds of ways of loosening them up. It is already happening. So one doesn't have to produce or to present certain set patterns of how to loosen up—it seems to happen automatically.

S: Isn't one of the problems that one can invite hopelessness in order to find hope. Such hopelessness is really hopeful.

V: Well, that tends to happen automatically.

S: But if one knows this in advance?

V: I don't think so. You might know it intellectually, but when you actually experience hopelessness it's quite different. We could talk about hunger in theory, but when we are actually hungry ourselves, it's quite different.

S: Is this hopelessness experienced as an emotional state?

V: It is an emotional state, yes, definitely.

S: Then what is the place of upaya?

V: To watch the hopelessness. Quite simple.

S: But it seems as if something more active is involved, at least in the way we were discussing it. The mind is doing something more active than merely watching.

V: Mind is acknowledging its hopelessness. And mind has to give up its trips. It happens naturally.

S: How is this arrived at? Is it arrived at by an active process of the mind?

V: No, it is arrived at by the actual process of the situation, seeing the hopelessness of the situation.

S: Is the hopelessness a projection? Is it some type of ground that is not empty yet?

V: That's right, yes.

S: When you reach this point of hopelessness you don't have to sit and meditate any more. Do you see this process really without concept?

V: You see, the whole process does not look like the mechanistic approach of what should we do after that, but it evolves out of the whole situation. And maybe you will find yourself meditating *more* after that process.

S: Does the path toward the experience of hopelessness necessarily include pain and despair?

V: Definitely, yes. Because you have no ground to stand on.

S: Does that mean we should actively seek out and attract these situations? [Laughter]

V: Not necessarily. That's generally what we are doing, actually. [Laughter] We seek out our permanent answer, nest, home. That in itself is heading towards hopelessness. That happens spontaneously.

S: What positive thing can possibly come out of a truly hopeless situation such as the tragedy in Bangladesh, a place where people are actually starving, not just in their minds? I mean, they are not simply deprived of comforts that we take for granted,- they are deprived of even having a meal. What positive thing can arise out of that for anyone who's involved in it?

V: I suppose you could say that it is beginning to realize that there's no ground, no psychological ground to stand on.

S: I can realize it, but do you think that those people can? As they are starving to death, do you think they realize that there's really no ground to stand on?

V: Much more so! It is physically obvious that you have no roof over your head.

S: But perhaps the despair leads right to death, so there's no beginning of hope at all.

S: Did you not say that mind watches the hopelessness?

V: Yes.

S: And doesn't that need some kind of training, say through meditation?

V: At this point it does not seem to be dependent on any particular training.

S: So the people in Bangladesh perhaps do not have the necessary training to realize their hopelessness.

V: No, but they begin to realize their solid idea of enemies and friends does not exist. The whole thing is purely a survival process, which is a very lucid situation. If an enemy comes and gives you food, you accept it gladly—as well as friends.

S: It destroys ideas.

V: There's no idea of politics at that level.

S: In actual fact, the process of experiencing this seems pretty complicated, though. One part of it is a growing sense of hopelessness and of the ground emptying out. But as you come up from there, the sun is very hot, babies are terrific, love is great from time to time, and work is good a lot. There is this counter pull. How does that not get broken? Or does this just deepen into an actual crisis in time? How to think about that?

V: I think the suggestion becomes deeper. Once you begin to realize that you can't control your physical situation, you begin to give up hope of strategizing. And the whole thing becomes a much more living process.

S: In this process, in regard to the bhumis of the last seminar, this seems to be "pre" any of them, is that right?
V: It is the first path, the path of accumulation.

We might have to stop at that point, friends, and have further discussion at the end of the next talk. Thank you.

Talk Three

Path

HAVING DISCUSSED the nonexistence of the basic ground already, we will discuss the nonexistence of the path. The basic principle of shunyata at this point, as far as the path is concerned, is a process in which the style of the path does not become a solid thing anymore. According to the shunyata principle, the style of the path is that it is an unconditioned path. It allows basic openness as well as basic confusion. Because of that particular nature, openness also could be regarded as confusion on the path.

Because of confusion on the path, because the whole path is confused, bewildered, one has to learn to relate with something. The way to relate with the path is by trying to relate with something that is there, which is the idea of compassion. The definition of compassion, or

karuna, is basic warmth, the absence of duality, absence of comparison, clear and uncompassionate space. Because of that uncompassionate space, therefore there is something basically healthy about that, solid about that. That is compassion. Something is actually happening, which is the idea of compassion.

The idea of compassion in this case is being basically open, willing to relate with what's happening in this given situation as it is. You don't expect reassurance and you don't expect threat. Once you are on the path it is definitely a solid thing already, and because of that there is warmth. You are finally willing to make a commitment to unknown territory. Unknown territory becomes known territory from that point of view, because it is unknown. You are taking a chance, you are willing to take a chance. That is the idea of compassion, being willing to take a chance as things develop in their own basic nature. You are willing to communicate. You are willing to take a chance.

Compassion is not being kind and loving necessarily, it is more openness. You are willing to relate with the whole process. Generally the experience of compassion is that somebody is rich and willing to give something away because of their charity. It is the idea of being charitable. You are healthy and you are going to save somebody else from an unhealthy situation. You know much more than other people do, you have more information, so you are trying to save those people from trouble. That is idiot compassion. Such compassion is based on levels: something is better than that, therefore I have the complete opportunity to do it.

The same thing could apply to dharma: somebody doesn't know about studying dharma and I do understand

the dharma. Therefore I tell somebody about the dharma and I figure I'm saving them from their confusion and ignorance. Or I have lots of money and those people don't. Still they are good people, worth giving that money to, and because of their condition I give them money. That particular process of compassion is idiot compassion, as we mentioned. People who receive compassionate gestures from such one-sided compassionate persons should help them again in reverse because *they* are confused. They are distorted because their belief in one-sidedness is too strong, too overwhelming.

The idea of compassion in this case, on the path, is that you feel or see the situation directly, fundamentally, fully. Because of that you could help others. It is not that you want to see them be happy, good, or healthy, but that people need help in the sense of realizing healthiness within themselves. They are already healthy people, they are already wealthy people. The basic idea of compassion from that point of view is an open situation, which is based on the shunyata principle, not on comparison.

Once you begin to see the hopelessness of the whole thing, you give up any kind of expectations. Because you give up expectations, you become more generous. Therefore you are willing to relate with what is there without your expectations. And because of that nonexpectation, you are more equipped when you are relating with other situations. That is the path of compassion.

We could say that the path of shunyata consists of compassion and wisdom, or knowledge. The knowledge that things need to be done according to what things are,

as well as things are so because you can't escape from that particular situation. That things are as they are is knowledge. That things are so in a given situation is skillful means, that we are going to work with that situation without any hesitation. So the path of compassion and shunyata consists of the union of compassion and knowledge, karuna and prajna. Because you see things as they are, you act accordingly, in accord with the given situation. Those two situations become prominent in terms of the path of compassion. We could have a discussion.

STUDENT: In the state of hopelessness, one has compassion, one reaches the state of the true path of compassion?

VlDYADHARA: Yes, precisely. Because you feel hopeless, therefore you feel compassion—because you don't feel better than anybody else. You are completely in contact with things as they are.

S: Where does skillful means enter into compassion?

V: If you are fully compassionate, you can't miss the point. If you don't miss the point, then you act accordingly. That is skillful means. Very simple.

S: If you become open and act compassionately, is that because by being open you experience the situation of the person who is before you in the same way as you experience yourself?

V: Not necessarily. There could be a person who is quite different, compared to your nature, but at the same time you see their basic qualities.

S: When you're at the beginning stage, obviously you can't be right on the point, since you are only beginning. So your openness and compassion, your actions, will be off the point slightly. Does that mean you should go back and meditate some more or just keep on and take the risk of irritation or tension in the space? Should you allow yourself to go into it, with the risk that you might not be on or get on the point? In other words, I guess that space is a lot like a mirror and will tell you whether you are not doing it right. Then you go back and meditate, I suppose. Or is it the kind of thing where you just sort of stumble along for a while and your actions sort of get on the point at the various stages of the path?
V: The idea of compassion in this case is straightforward. You can't strategize, you can't steer around. Therefore I suppose what you say is true, that you just have to accept the given situation. You just have to get into it. Mistakes become part of the creative process automatically.

S: You mentioned "basic qualities" in the other person. Is that seeing the ground of the other person as being your own ground, that basic quality you see in the other person? What is that basic quality?
V: It is a mutual understanding in terms of projection and projector. That you don't see a distinction between what ought to be, or what should be, and what things are, as it is. That other person or other situation is unmistakable, it is so. It is like the sun shines tomorrow, maybe overcast, and sets tomorrow as well. One can't argue about that. That's the basic quality. The situation shows that as it is, you can't argue about that.
S: In other words, if we were free we would see that basic quality, if we were free in ourselves to see it.

V: If you are not free, you are going to be shook by it. You are going to be awakened by it, reminded by it.

S: Do you think compassion is projection as well?
V: Both, theater and projector.
S: But that is something that is really not looking outward, there's no space —
V: That's right, yeah.

S: You talked about how compassion arises out of hopelessness. That has a very somber kind of feel to it. Somehow the whole seminar has a very somber feel to it, at least for me,- whereas in the Bodhisattva Path Seminar [March 1972 Karme-Choling] you talked about compassion as arising out of generosity, in the sense of one's own richness and that the first stage of the bodhisattva path is called the joyful one. I'm a little confused as to why in that case it comes off sounding positive and in this case it comes off sounding so somber.
V: Well, if we are discussing the five paths, what we are discussing in this case is the first path, the layman's path, before you come to the bodhisattva's path. It is the path of accumulation. In terms of the path of accumulation, you must be concerned with the ten virtuous actions. There are three of the body, bodily skillful ways of dealing with situations, four of speech, and three of mind. So the whole process is a skillful one at this point.

When a layman begins on the path, he or she should relate with the path as choicelessness. There is no choice once you commit to the path. Laymen usually begin on the path by taking refuge. "I am part of the dharma. I take refuge in the dharma and the buddha and the

sangha. I have no choice." Because of its choicelessness, you have already escaped. Because you have already escaped, therefore the path presented to you is obvious. There is no way out, no way of giving in to dependencies of any kind at all. So it seem that we are discussing different levels.

S: Because of that, would you say it is important to have a rather clear idea of the levels on the path, without getting hung up on it, because of the confusion it will engender if you mistake the highlights of one level for something else on a different level? Or is that something that would happen anyway?

V: There are no levels. That is an important point. Absolutely no levels. That's what confuses us always. When spiritual teachings are presented to people, there are so many levels presented to you—etheric body, spiritual body, physical body, whatever. Those levels are nonsense, they don't happen that way.

S: No, by levels I meant the bhumis and the two —

V: They are not regarded as levels, they are regarded as stepping stones, a staircase.

S: That's what I meant.

V: I mean the bhumis are not really levels. They are staircases, so to speak. They are not regarded as levels as such. What we are discussing is body and mind, physical and mental, both situations. As far as the physical mind-body, psycho-physical body, is concerned, there are no levels. It is a cooperating situation.

S: I'm not quite sure. Should you have a fair idea of the steps?

V: It's not particularly should you or shouldn't you, but it happens.

S: Mm-hmm.

V: For instance, should you be one or two years old? That is a matter of whether you *are* one year old or two years old. You are going to be two years or three years old and you are going to your own birthdays in any case. You can't escape that. It's not planned.

S: Just before my question, someone had asked something about generosity, confusing that level with the layman's level. That kind of thing could create certain confusions in whatever you are doing, perhaps.

V: I don't think so.

S: You don't think it would?

V: I don't think so at all. It is been said that layman should not act like bodhisattvas, and bodhisattvas should not act like yogins. Yogins should not act as buddhas. Buddhas should not act as herukas. It's quite definite.

S: Yeah, but do you have to know where the buddha is that you're not, that you shouldn't act as?

V: That doesn't apply, that's just a formula.

S: Just a formula?

V: It doesn't apply anymore—whether you are a yogin or yogini, whether you are bodhisattva, you can't act like that. You'll be caught.

S: Are the refuges also supposed to be taken with hopelessness?

V: Definitely! [Laughter] That is a very good question, actually. You have no other alternatives, you give up hopes and sidetracks of any kind. Therefore you take refuge in the buddha, dharma and sangha. You are finally giving in to the main road, you give up side tracks.

It is a final gesture of hopelessness. That's why it is called taking refuge. You have no other resources. It is an extremely healthy thing to do and very sensible.

Generosity begins at the level when you give up hope. There is no other choice. Because there is no other choice, therefore you become more generous. You are willing to admit whatever. At that point one also begins to realize that ego has no other choice but to give itself up. Discovering this is a further spiritual adventure involved in generosity.

S: I was wondering about attachment to compassion and if compassion is the product of greed. You said that the bodhisattva was attached to compassion—how is that possible?

V: Better make something up. [Laughter]

S: One time you said that you agreed that a bodhisattva does have an attachment to compassion and it seems to fit this basic description in any case. That's why he or she is not a buddha. But if compassion is not a projection, how is it possible to be attached to it? You can only be attached to a projection.

V: It is a projection, compassion is a projection. In many cases, it starts at the bodhisattva level of the different bhumis because of your objective of generosity, discipline, patience, energy, meditation, and prajna. Your object is to be related with all that. That is why they are called different levels, or bhumis. The bodhisattva path has levels to communicate, levels to be related with. It is levels automatically.

S: In this case then, is it an attachment to something that is both a projection and not a projection?

V: Whether it is a projection or not, bodhisattvas are concerned with their work. It is a question of their duty rather than convention or having to relate with their credentials. They just become serious, honest workers. That's what bodhisattvas are.

S: Then why aren't they buddhas?

V: Buddhas do not experience hopelessness. [Laughter] You might say they are *being,* they are not workers. The sun is not regarded as a worker. Although you could say that it fulfills the fertility of the earth, you can't say that the sun is working hard to fulfill the ground, to grow plants and produce light and things. That's why there is the analogy of one moon in thirteen hundred bowls of water. Buddhas don't work hard, they are just *being.* And by being, they work hard automatically. Their work fulfills for them.

S: In one of the sutras the Buddha said that for beings there is rest but for me there is no rest. I forgot the sutra, but he said, "As for me there is no rest."

V: Precisely! The sun has no rest either.

S: It's not working either.

V: Not working. Being the sun is working hard—at the same time it is resting.

S: And the bodhisattva is just a guy with—

V: A certain intention or direction is involved. It's more like a torch than the sun, as far as a bodhisattva is concerned. A torch has to survive on oil, but the buddha's standard does not need oil.

S: What is the oil then?

V: For a bodhisattva? The energy is prajna and shunyata is the oil. Shunyata is the oil on which they survive and the flame is upaya, skillful means. So they work with the combination of shunyata and upaya.

S: But the historical buddha was not buddha, because the historical buddha was working—forty-nine years.
V: Well, he wasn't buddha until the end of his life,- until he was twenty-nine he wasn't a buddha, he was a bodhisattva. But the historical buddha was never buddha, because he was the historical one. [Laughter] If you say that, we will be regarded as renegades. But it is so.

S: At first we were talking about ground, which is everywhere. When we talk about path, it seems to set up a kind of narrowness or possibility of going off the path. And then there is the question of discipline. Is the analogy of the path kind of like computing, because either you are on it or off it? But if both are shunyata?
V: Well, when we talk about the shunyata path, in the beginning, we had a solid path, a narrow path, giving up hope and fear both. It is extremely austere, really. You have no way of venturing about at all, it is very austere. You only have one step to work with, which is without hope, without fear, just straight on the true path, absolute path. Beyond that, the path becomes an open path. It depends on how open you are. It is not a question of the nature of the path, but it is a question of how open you are. Depending on how open you are, that much freedom there is.

S: Rinpoche, I don't understand projection. Did you say that compassion is a projection?

V: Compassion is a *conditioned* projection. And projections are what exists between the chaos of that and this. In other words, we could say that projections are the chaos and compassion is the intermediary between projection and projector.

S: You don't mean projection in the sense that psychology uses projection, as a fantasy, something you made up. You don't mean it like that?

V: Your enemy or your lover is a projection in this case.

S: Mm-hmm. Oh, I see.

S: Would the bodhisattva be in communication with emotions then?

V: What else? That is his path. That's the only path, that the bodhisattva can exist with his emotions.

S: How do you go about communicating with those noncommunicative things?

V: It has nothing to do with that, not communicating with the situation at all. Anything that exists beyond radiation communicates with the situation.

S: It seems they are pretty one way. I mean, my emotions seem to be communicating with me, but I am not clear enough on whatever I've got to say to them.

V: Oy vey.

S: Yeah. I can be angry now or embarrassed now, but the emotion is coming towards me; whereas any communication coming to them is not —

V: I don't know what you are talking about, what you are asking.

S: Is the path out of hopelessness?

V: It is *within* hopelessness.

S: Why not just remain in the so-called hopelessness which is what is, completely true?

V: When you lose hope, you lose hope. Then true hope begins to arise, when you begin to realize hopelessness. It's the same thing when you begin to give up the clouds which cover the sun, which is the hopelessness of the sun. When there are no clouds, the hopelessness is gone—the sun is right there! I shouldn't have said that. [Laughter] Too much love and light. [Laughter] However—that is what we teach.

S: In the early stages of the path, when you're communicating would there be a greater tendency for the communication to be energetic in the sense of surprise?

V: I think so, yes. There are constant surprises all the time, that you didn't believe it but it is so. What you thought turns out to be [inaudible]. All kinds of things go on outrageously. The confusion before the realization is regarded as the realization before the confusion. All kinds of confusion take place, which is realization, and so forth.

We should stop at that point. I would like to have a good discussion, maybe tomorrow. The whole idea of the shunyata seminar is not to present further stuff so that you get more confused, but to find some way out of confusion because confusion does exist. So it would be good if you had a really solid good discussion tomorrow. That would be good. And quite possibly we might have a discussion period before the talk, and then have the

talk, and then have further discussion afterwards. That would be good.

I feel personally responsible. Talking about shunyata is a very heavy subject. I might do a disservice to the audience by getting bogged down in the confusion of shunyata. And on the whole, this particular seminar does not provide promises of any kind of enlightenment, no promises, none whatsoever. You could say that it promises more confusion. However, that confusion could be intelligent confusion as opposed to confused confusion. [Laughter]

Talk Four

Fruition

HAVING DISCUSSED the path of shunyata, the path itself becomes the goal in some sense. But at the same time, we realize that the goal is not a place one finds permanency or permanent security to dwell on or dwell in. The concept of shunyata is ceaseless space, like the analogy of outer space which never ends. In some sense, the shunyata principle could be called a goal: in the sense of going from imperfection to perfection it could be called a goal. But it is not really a definite goal in the sense of achievement or a peak experience in which the student stops. In other words, the all-pervading quality of shunyata provides tremendous room to expand constantly. From that point of view, achievement is the beginning point of another odyssey. The energy of compassion and of prajna, or knowledge, constantly goes

on. But metaphorically, if we discuss the idea of a goal, then that goal is two-fold kaya: the kaya of form and the kaya of formlessness. *Kaya* is a Sanskrit word meaning "form," "body." Two-fold kaya comes from the experience of transcending the two-fold barriers of ego: conflicting emotions and primitive beliefs about reality.

You might call conflicting emotions anti-shunyata, because they do not allow or experience any space or lubrication to develop things. They are solid and definite. It is like the analogy of the pig in the symbol of ignorance which just follows its nose and never sees directions of any kind at all. It just keeps following, constantly guided by impulse. And whatever comes in front of its nose, it just consumes it and looks for the next one. That is conflicted emotions. In this case we are talking about emotions as primitive emotions. Take the example of anger, for instance. There is the primitive, conflicted quality of anger and there is also the energetic quality of the anger, which is quite different. Conflicting emotions are those that are purely trying to secure ego's aim and object, trying to fulfill ego's demand. They are based on constantly looking for security, maintaining the identity of "I am." Conflicting emotions also contain energy, which is the compassionate nature, the basic warmth and basic creative process. But somehow in that situation of primitive emotions there is very little generosity of letting energy function by itself.

Conflicting emotions try to hold emotions as obligatory emotions that should maintain some function, maintain ego. Of course there is constant conflict with that particular style. Such a one-sided point of view brings discomfort, dissatisfaction, frustration and so forth. The operating style of conflicting emotions is that

narrow-minded point of view. In some sense we could say it is a one-track mind style. There is concern that there is particular thing to fulfill, so it goes directly to that peak point and never considers the situations around it. That is why it is conflicting emotions, or primitive emotions, as opposed to compassionate emotions.

We could say the compassionate aspect of emotions is quite different. It has more space and it has panoramic qualities. At the same time, the compassionate aspect of emotions still has a sense of duality, we might say, because compassion also contains prajna, or knowledge. In order to have a perception or knowledge you have to have dualistic awareness, dualistic consciousness. But that is not particularly dualistic *fixation*, as in the primitive emotions. [Simply] seeing two situations is not regarded as dualistic fixation in the pejorative sense. But seeing two in terms of goal orientation or security orientation is primitive,- there is no element of openness at all.

So the quality of primitive emotional conflict, conflicting emotions, is like color or paint. It is definite and solid—it can't be interpreted, can't be changed. Whether it is just blue, just green, or just yellow, it has to be a definite thing. [Primitive] emotions have different expectations to fulfill its desire, fulfill its function. But in order to fulfill, strangely enough, that particular color or paint has to have some medium, oil or water. And that oil or water is the sophisticated emotions of compassion, or the liberated emotions, whatever you would like to call it. In other words, the primitive quality of the emotions goes along with the advanced emotions of compassion or understanding. That is the only point where the conflicting emotions could be transformed into

something else, for the very reason that conflicting emotions are dependent on that medium.

And quite possibly, the more concentrated the medium, the weaker the intensity of the colors. They would be just faint colors of blue, faint colors of yellow, in which the other colors could be introduced because basically that color is not a particularly solid color. The whole thing is that much more accommodating. So from that point of view conflicting emotions contain the weakness of maintaining their conflicted emotion-ness. They have the potential of changing and developing into something else. And the medium in which the color is carried could be said to be the shunyata experience. That is the fundamental lubrication in which emotions could be developed into a different style, could be made more transparent.

The other aspect, the second veil or bondage of ego, is primitive belief about reality. Primitive belief about reality is, again, not necessarily based on emotions as such, but on conflict. It is based on subconscious emotions rather than conscious emotions, that undercurrent which inclines towards goals, towards achieving, towards directions, towards security. It is more of a tendency rather than living emotions as solid and powerful as the conflicting emotions were. But it also needs some lubrication in order to function. In other words, without oxygen we cannot breathe, we cannot function. So there is a basic environment or climate in which primitive belief about reality functions. The reason it is primitive is because it is dependent on something else, it is not a self-sufficient concept or idea.

Of the two veils of ego, conflicting emotions could be said to be that of psychological materialism, the

literalness of it. The other veil, primitive belief about reality, is spiritual materialism. In some sense it is highly sophisticated, but there is still belief in being saved or being helped. There is permanent promise. The achievement or attainment of enlightenment is regarded as one permanent situation in which you can function, you can relax. You can live in it, make a home of it, too. And also, because it contains philosophical speculation in terms of a way to exist, there is a sense of survival. We are trying to survive, therefore we are searching for spiritual practice. But that spiritual practice is to attain immortality. The reason we search for a spiritual path is that we feel that we might not survive, might not be able to exist as an independent entity and being. So we have two kinds of misunderstandings. We have the childlike primitive mind, that you just want to get what you want, and if you don't get what you want you get frustrated. And we have the other one, that you think you could strategize the whole thing and then you will get what you want. Two types of struggle or bondage.

Those two types of bondage are related with the two kaya principle, the two bodies or forms of buddha that we were talking about in terms of the goal of shunyata, the achievement of shunyata, metaphorically speaking. The body of form transcends conflicting emotions, and the body of formlessness transcends primitive belief about reality. The body of formlessness is the dharmakaya, and the body of form is the nirmanakaya and sambhogakaya. The body of form is based on a direct relationship with reality [nirmanakaya] and a direct relationship with energy [sambhogakaya], which is an earthy situation. Both are earthy situations. In other words we could say that there is visual perception and

there is audial perception. The visual perceptions could be said to be the nirmanakaya of the solid textures of life, and the audial perceptions to be the sambhogakaya of energy, vibrations, speech and so on. And none of these final stages of buddha, the experience of buddhahood, can exist without the background of shunyata. You cannot perceive form and you cannot attain enlightenment unless you are able to see that form also contains space. And you cannot attain an ultimate understanding of energy or vibration or musical sound unless you begin to see that music also contains silence. Energy contains action as well as nonaction, both are energy levels. Otherwise there is a tendency to become self-destructive.

So in this case, the state of form in the final experience of shunyata is that of basic existence in which there is no distortion of any kind whatsoever. It is not influenced by primitive emotions or primitive belief. Everything is seen clearly, precisely, right on the point. Form is seen as form because we also see the formlessness of it. It is based on the form as well as the emptiness around the form. And sound is heard, energy is felt because sound contains silence as well and energy contains nonaction as well.

So shunyata in this case is panoramic vision in which things could be accommodated. At the same time the accommodation itself becomes a perception of its own. In other words the container and what is contained become one. They complement each other. Therefore there is no question about maintaining the container in order to contain what is contained. In terms of the dharmakaya principle, the formlessness of the second kaya, it is state of complete openness because

dharmakaya or formlessness is not dependent on any relative proof. It is completely free of comparison. For the very fact that it could exist by itself, therefore, this level of understanding of the shunyata principle is almost more at the level of what is called *jnana,* which means "wisdom."

The difference between jnana, or wisdom, and prajna, or knowledge, is that in the case of knowledge you still need relationship. It is still *experience* as far as the popular idea of shunyata is concerned. There is still play, interchange, interaction, at the level of form and energy. In the case of dharmakaya there is no relationship, there is no interaction or interchange. But it seems to be rather difficult explaining that particular state, because in fact we cannot say that there is *not* interchange, there is *not* relationship. But quite much more to the point is that interchange or relationship is not valid anymore. It is already related, it is already interchanged. Therefore the question of being in that state of dharmakaya shunyata experience is futile. We can't say that we have achieved dharmakaya or that you have achieved that particular state of wisdom, or jnana, at all. In other words we could say that jnana cannot be achieved. Jnana consumes us, rather than one relating to jnana.

So the last part of shunyata's achievement is the experience of ultimate nonego. You could have the experience of ego to begin with as a hang-up, problematic, irritating. Then you have the transcending of that ego and you feel the absence of ego, the nondualistic qualities of ego, you feel a sense of emptiness, a sense of absence. In the end, at the dharmakaya level, even the absence of ego is not felt, because the whole thing is not seen as an attainment in

any way at all. It is not regarded as attainment or nonattainment. In other words the ultimate understanding of shunyata, or the attainment of shunyatahood, so to speak, is impossible from that point of view. If there are any possibilities, that in itself is self-defeating. Impossible in this sense does not necessarily mean that you can't have it, you can't get to it. But the question of getting it does not apply any more. The question of having it does not apply any more. It is the complete destruction of ego, completely dissolving the state of ego. So we cannot celebrate that we have attained enlightenment because there is no one to take part in the celebration. We could have a discussion.

STUDENT: Is there anything positive you can say about ego? Is there anything beneficial about ego? Do you know what I mean?
VIDYADHARA: Well, I suppose the spiritual search altogether is due to ego. Without ego we wouldn't be studying. So ego is the instigator of the whole thing.

S: I have some difficulty with the idea of containment, for instance, that sound contains silence. I can understand that sound *implies* silence, that form *implies* space, or maybe sound *arose out of* silence, but the idea that sound *contains* silence is something I don't grasp.
V: You see, that is basically the point of view in which you don't regard yourself as the listener to the sound. The sound or music plays by itself and does not have a player or a listener. Then sound is contained by itself. It's a question of mostly using the language of evaluation, that there is an audience to judge it. So you hear the

sound according to the audience, rather than the sound being heard by itself. [Snaps fan]

S: Would the formulation that sound *implies* silence and silence *implies* sound be consistent with that?

V: That's right, yes. They are complementary to one other.

S: One can't exist without the other.

V: That's right. Sound can exist without an audience, without a listener, but sound cannot exist without silence. The idea of shunyata that we have been talking about all this time is not shunyata as we see it, but shunyata as it is—from the point of view of its own dimension.

S: And it's always the ego that evaluates.

V: That's right, it is ego that evaluates. And it is also because of ego that we find enormous distorting.

S: But once you rid yourself of the ego, you merge with the total situation.

V: That only could happen through ego.

S: You have to pass through that door.

V: You have to have ego—somewhat. [Laughter]

S: But it isn't necessarily that we should all like it though? [Partially inaudible]

V: At that point evaluation doesn't apply. Liking or disliking is arbitrary, because ego is also arbitrary.

S: What would be intelligent discrimination, as in the buddha family wisdom of discrimination, discriminating wisdom?

V: That is nonwatcher, from the point of view of ego. You don't have to watch, you don't have to experience, in other words. The experience is there already; therefore the situation becomes discriminating awareness rather

than that you are discriminating. Therefore the whole idea of skillful means is that you work according to the situation rather than your view of the situation. You work accordingly, which is still very slow.

S: You said that at first shunyata has a very cold quality, and then you said that after you lose your fears, shunyata develops a warm quality. Could you comment on that?
V: To begin with, when we realize that the primitive idea of security does not apply anymore, it is very terrifying, threatening. That comes from the idea of looking for a secure home, to begin with, that you regard spiritual practice as something that secures you. But you come to the understanding that that is not so, that you have to give up the security and give up hope and everything. That gives new perspective to the whole practice. You tend to try to struggle with that, trying to interpret and to reinterpret—that giving up hope is the ultimate hope, giving up security is the ultimate security and so forth. And we can go on like that, trying to find a way of twisting it around. But we realize that there is no hope, there is no way of finding a new strategy because shunyata is a hard fact. There is nothing you can con about it.

Then, having accepted the whole thing, you can begin to relax. You begin to let things fall through because you realize you have nothing really to lose. If you have anything happen there is something to gain. So that is the starting point where warmth begins to happen, generosity begins to develop. You have nothing to lose, therefore you have nothing to secure about anything at all. And the spontaneous quality of warmth and compassion is the expression of generosity. You become

generous to yourself to begin with; therefore the expression of being generous to others becomes a natural situation.

S: Would you say something about the primitive energy of anger?

V: Anger seems to be the same as any of the other emotions. You decide to develop repelling vibrations, as a way of proving that you don't need anything. You have everything, therefore you can afford to lose, you can afford to crush down and destroy. It is based on passion, fundamentally speaking. You are so passionately involved in trying to prove something. And the way of demonstrating that passion is rejection, pressing down, destroying.

S: The liberation of it, being prepared for that through the tradition, would create security?

V: It creates apprehension. You find that you have to stick to the dogma as something to hang on to, otherwise you could lose everything—which actually doesn't mean that you won't begin to do that. So the after-effect [of any of those] is to explode, destroy, crush down and then stick to your own logic, your own dogma, your own philosophy, which secures you and makes you have the right to be angry.

S: Could you just think about the death of shunyata?

V: I suppose you could say that the death of shunyata is that when the first two kayas have been passed beyond, prajna becomes jnana. That is the death of shunyata because shunyata means that you are being aware of emptiness, being aware of formlessness, of the

nondualistic state. And that negativity becomes part of the learning process, part of one's experience. So finally experience begin to merge into nonexperience, nonattainment. That is the experience of dharmakaya, that prajna becomes jnana. Thank you.

S: Do you mean that which is aware of space actually becomes space itself? So there is no, there is not —

V: That's right, yes. I know what you mean. [Laughter]

S: What is the difference between evaluation and discrimination?

V: You could say that evaluation is primitive discrimination. You don't see things as they are, but you need some help to see things as they are, which is putting value on it. But in true discrimination, particularly in terms of discriminating awareness wisdom, you don't need the help of evaluation anymore because you just see things simply as they are without reinforcement. In other words, evaluation seems to have a sense of uncertainty. You need somebody else, somebody else's help to make sure that your experience is the safe one, the right one, the good one or the bad one, whatever. In the case of discriminating, you are not dependent on anything at all. It's just first-hand experience, one blow.

S: Rinpoche, why does buddhist literature sometimes say to stop discriminating and other times says discriminating mind is the mind of wisdom? Yesterday you mentioned something about discrimination and projection, that you discriminate that it's four o'clock or you discriminate that this is an enemy and that is a lover, that kind of stuff.

That is a kind of discrimination, but I have a feeling that there is also a bad kind. Do you know what that is?
V: Well, as I said already, discriminating in terms of evaluation is primitive discrimination. Once you have perceived things, I don't think you need to evaluate them, or that you need confirmation. In the case of discriminating awareness wisdom, evaluation doesn't apply anymore because evaluation confuses you further as to what you are discriminating.
S: Is it more direct?
V: Yes. We could say that it is your flash of experience.
S: What?
V: The spontaneity.

S: Rinpoche, I've been trying to figure out what you mean by discipline. I'm not exactly sure.
V: Again, there seem to be different levels of discipline: disciplining in order to achieve something and disciplining because things are as they are. The first one, disciplining because of something, is not really discipline but looking for an alternative situation to occupy your renunciation by accepting something new into it. There's the story of King Prithika who dreamt elephants went out of the house through the window but their tails could not get out of the window. He thought that was a bad omen for his kingdom, his future. So he asked the Buddha. And the Buddha said that is a prophetic dream for my followers. They leave home and renounce their homes and sense pleasures, but their viharas, or monasteries, become secondary homes. So they can't get out of that, their tails get stuck.

Then there is another kind of discipline, which is just reducing unnecessary things. It is not necessarily giving up or renouncing, but simplifying, not producing new stuff or further confusions to occupy yourself. It is like the practice of meditation, for instance. It is a simple technique, a simple practice, and you just work with that. You are not regarded as following a course, but you regard your practice as purely relating with your basic innate nature. No further stuff has been introduced at all. The same thing applies in your living situation. You live a disciplined life by not introducing further chaos. That chaos might take the form of seduction or the form of destroying seduction, whatever it may be. Both seem to be sidetracks. So discipline is being true, to the right point, not introducing further stuff, not giving yourself further toys.

S: You spoke of the obligatory emotions of the ego, the repertory of emotions driving the ego. I wonder if you mean that they are obligatory in the sense that in the state one is in—and the ego is the result of that state—those emotions are also necessary, that they are both necessary and convincing to this state. You also said that the ego is distorting something in the process. Is it the material of the higher emotions that is being distorted? Is that material always there, but in wrong function in the state where we are within the sleep of ego? And then one's recognition begins to awaken about how lost one is in this state and that recognition begins to free that material back into the place in you where it can function with its right normality. That is, you might mature emotions or develop emotions through freeing yourself from using the material of emotions.

V: Obligatory is simply from ego's point of view. It is obligatory because we have to maintain ourselves by presenting all kinds of occupations. We reject that which is about to attack our territory and we invite that which secures our territory. That seems to be the obligatory ape-instinct ego, animal instinct of ego.

S: To maintain its state?

V: To maintain itself, yes. But at the same time, the validity of ego is the question. Actually, there is no such thing as ego as a solid thing at all. Should we regard ego as a substantial entity? According to ego's appearance in the past, the meditative path as well as our own experience shows that ego is not founded on solid ground, but ego is founded on playing with interactions. Ego is founded on relative situations. Unless there is the logic of relativity, ego cannot exist; it cannot exist independent of relative law. So ego becomes irrelevant from that point of view for the very reason that there is no such thing as ultimate ego. If there is going to be an ultimate one then it has to be free from relative notions. So ego is not relevant. Therefore its obligatory actions are also not relevant.

S: If it's a false state, or a relative state, still it malfunctions possibly higher energy processes and it maintains the reduction, a pathological reduction of the energies of consciousness.

V: It's hard to maintain oneself. You'd rather stick to your whatever, your lie or your confusion.

S: Without knowing?

V: Without knowing. Even though you might know that it is a possible failure of establishing firm ground,

still you may feel you should try to set up some kind of security, so you do it.

S: You like the mistake, you like it.

V: Try to like it.

S: Rinpoche, would spiritual materialism permeate as long as one has an ego? I guess it could be equated to that idea of gaining something spiritual.

V: I suppose in the subtle sense, as long as there is ego there would be spiritual materialism, definitely, as a faint subconscious desire. But the crude quality of spiritual materialism could be understood, including ego. While you are not free from ego, you still can understand spiritual materialism and take certain solid and crude measures to avoid spiritual materialism. It is not really a refined thing, to the point of dissolving ego. One can do something about it. At the same time that doesn't mean there is no tendency of spiritual materialism at all. As long as there is ego there will be some tendency of achievement, of getting somewhere, becoming a better person, whatever. There are always those tendencies there.

S: I was wondering also why there seems to be such an overabundance of spiritual materialism in the West.

V: Well, the western mind operates in turns of achievement. If you are a climber of mountains, a mountaineer, you don't just climb, you climb in order to get some reward, break a record, make world history, or whatever. So even if the search is supposedly a pleasurable one, still there is meaning behind it. You must be doing something always. You must be. You must not be idle. The same thing applies even if we are

meditating. We try to prove to ourselves that we are not being idle, but we are productive people whether we meditate [or not]. We meditate in order to be more productive! [Laughter] That kind of relation goes on always. So it's a natural tendency—losing grip is socially, economically, something that we don't want to face.

S: Is it ego, or ego image, that represses that? Because all these examples seem to be identical to the image we have of ourselves, in other words, ego image. Can't ego exist without the image?

V: That seems to be saying the same thing. Ego is built out of image, so if you don't have image you don't have ego either, because ego thrives on image. It's saying the same thing. There is no such thing as a subtle ego. Ego is always based on some form, some particular energy which is obvious.

S: You mean that without image there is no ego?

V: There is no ego, that's right.

S: Rinpoche, sometimes I just like to sit and do nothing, not even meditate, but just maybe feel my mouth get dry or my little finger hurt or something like that. But after a very short while I get panicky because so little happens. And yet I would like to be able to do that. It is like I'm enjoying that somehow, and then I'm not able to.

V: You are enjoying that?

S: Well, I think it's only pleasure, I don't know. The moment I'm doing it I'm enjoying it, but after a short while I feel panicky, like nothing is happening here at all. I can't explain why I get panicky.

V: I suppose we could say that when you lose grip of something then you are alarmed, that always tends to

happen. It's a question of meditation being especially presented so that you lose your grip on ego. So it's very frightening at the beginning. You begin to realize that you are losing something, but at the same time you don't know what that something is. But something is leaving you.

S: So should I forget about being panicky and just continue?

V: Even if you try to forget the panicking it will be there always anyway.

S: Or should I accept the panicking and just go on?

V: Rather.

S: What?

V: Rather.

S: Rather? [Laughter]

V: Mm-hmm. [Laughter]

S: Rinpoche, in terms of the image, the ego being in the image, when you look at us do you see the image before our expression of ego distorting something very high?

V: Hmm! [Laughter]

S: How can you make me see that?

V: Well, if you were willing to see it you could see it.

S: I like my expressions, you mean.

V: That's what I mean.

S: The momentum and the action of it is monumentally gripping!

V: Yes. [Laughter] There is no question of how to do it, but if you are willing to do it, it's there. That's very difficult to accept because we want to know *how* to do it, which means another kind of security. You simply refuse: you can't just do it, you have to be told how to do

it. That is one of the biggest problems that a lot of my students have, it seems.

S: Sir, do various amounts of hopelessness develop along with the development of certain psychological states along the path?

V: Well, it depends.

S: But if it happens, it doesn't happen all at once but different amounts of it tend to go along —

V: Not necessarily. Depending on how much you give in to losing grip, that much development takes place.

S: What if a mountain becomes like a volcano?

V: Then it is so, what about it?

S: It's pretty frightening!

V: Delightful [inaudible], too.

S: But is there a good way to pacify a mountain?

V: No, it doesn't sound like a practical thing to do.

S: What about surrendering?

V: Even if you try to surrender in order to pacify, that in itself becomes a game. You are thrown back. You see, what we are doing in this case is dealing with natural forces. You can't strategize and you can't manipulate them because they are natural forces. You can think of different ways of touching fire, think this is not fire, think this is water, think it is going to be nice and warm, but nonetheless your hands are going to get burned whatever you try. [Laughter] There's no way of fooling the elements. What we are dealing with is the most powerful element of all, which is called mind.

S: But didn't you sort of guarantee that the operation would be a slow, surgical thing, that the operation would be very slow—not like the Naropa thing.

V: Well, there have to be some dramatic operations sometimes, as you say.

S: Rinpoche, Milarepa described his mind as residing in dharmakaya. I know he just said it, but nonetheless it seemed somewhat strange. And in the Diamond Sutra, Subhuti describes his enlightenment. The context there was: I think indeed that I don't, so I am. But he's saying that he is! You'd think that a person in the dharmakaya would not care about that. Why would he say, "My mind resides in the dharmakaya?"

V: The whole point is that you are not reduced into deaf and dumb.

S: I was afraid of that answer.

V: You become more intelligent.

S: Is it the dharmakaya itself speaking at that point?

V: Dharmakaya, yes. Dharmakaya is dharma body, the body which is the dharma itself. It has developed all kinds of skillful ways of presenting the teachings, so it could speak for itself.

S: And it is aware of itself enough to.

V: I wouldn't say aware of itself, but it happens that way. [Laughter]

S: There is no way you could compare that mind to our own as we experience it now?

V: Well, I suppose we could try very hard to compare, but it wouldn't be accurate to do that. You have to speak through the language of metaphor. Then the metaphor

itself becomes a hang-up. It's like the old story of the person who points out the moon to his child. When the child asks, "What is the moon?," he points and says, "That is the moon." And the child says, "Oh I never realized that the moon was oblong." [Laughter]

S: Is the light inside the mind part of shunyata or is it a side track, some kind of diversion?
V: The light?
S: The light, the clear light.
V: It depends on what you refer to as light. Obviously it is not just a visual matter.
S: When you go inside your mind, it's like there's a bright light and if you keep meditating it gets brighter and brighter.
V: Does it?
S: I think so. They say there are seven steps on the way to the third eye.
V: Umm—no! [Laughter]
S: I was wondering what that had to do with shunyata?
V: Doesn't sound like it, particularly. [Laughter] Shunyata is very simple. That's why it is called shunyata, empty. There's nothing, absolutely nothing.
S: But what is the light, what is that?
V: Reflections, I suppose, [injuries?] tend to make, create a spark.

S: When you talk about surrendering ego, at least to me it is a very fearful thing. Without the fear though, could the surrender of ego be the first act of generosity from your point of view?

V: But that seems to be what we have to start with. There's no other way, you see. There's no way of getting sedatives so that you won't be afraid of surrendering and *then* surrendering. That's not possible at all. We have to use the fear itself as a stepping stone. That's the style of practice that is always presented—using whatever is there as an obstacle as a ladder, stepping stone. That seems to be the only way that we can do it. We can't start perfectly, but we have to start in a clumsy way. Finally, that clumsiness becomes perfection because we are willing to relate with it. It wears itself out. That seem to be the only way that we can do it—whatever we do.

S: By attrition it wears itself out, by doing it?

V: By actually pushing it, doing it—as *though* you are doing it, rather.

S: Does that happen only through meditation or are there things that you can consciously have in your life?

V: Anything in your life. If your life is regarded as a learning process there will be all kinds of opportunities to do that.

S: Rinpoche, is it possible that people who haven't lost their ego yet will sometimes act in an egoless way?

V: There are always possibilities. Glimpses of egolessness happen quite frequently. I wouldn't say that you have to get to a definite state, necessarily. There are always possibilities of doing something by chance—apparently by chance.

Well, we might have to close our sermon on shunyata.

S: I have sort of a ragged question—in the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation,* Gampopa described a whole series of hells,

eighteen hells, and I don't know how many heavens. He also talks very definitely, that if you do this, the fate of that will naturally be that. How literally is all that supposed to be taken or what? [Laughter]

V: Well, the thing is that it is possible. It is possible and it might be literal.

S: You mean those hells actually exist in so many miles down in the depths of the earth? And you have beings boiling you in hot copper and putting things into your mouth and —

V: Possible. [Laughter] I think saying it is not literal, that it is purely symbolic, has a different tone to it. Somehow it is not wise to say that it is purely symbolic. But on the whole, what is the difference between symbol and reality any way?

S: We use the symbol as an expression of something which cannot be —

V: Precisely, yes. So the intensity of the result of aggression can only be described by hell, descriptions of how grotesquely you could be boiled or punished or tortured.

S: What marks the karmic sequences he lays out there?

V: Well, nobody has done any research work on that particularly, [laughter] like the study of physics and chemistry. But it is based on, or depends on, the level of absent-mindedness, of not being on the spot. There are all kinds of sidetracks that you suffer, anyway.

S: But he gives specific instances: if you do this, that happens.

V: That's right. Yes.

S: That's very precise speaking. How precise is it supposed to be?

V: Up to you.

S: I can't figure it out, that's why I am asking you.

V: Try to figure it out! [Laughter]

S: Well, [inaudible phrase] —

V: Shunyata study seems to have evolved itself from the groundwork of shunyata, in which we discussed hopelessness and disappointment and so on—that you have no ground to work with. Then there's the path, in which giving up hope becomes connected with warmth and generosity. Finally one begins to realize that one can be generous, how to be generous. From that path, the final point of shunyata transcends relating with shunyata as an experience. The question of goal and path does not exist. So it seems that the shunyata principle altogether is the ground in which everything functions, everything happens—it is the space which accommodates everything.

There is a book on the *Prajnaparamita Hridaya* and *Prajnaparamita Alankara,* translated by Dr. Conze which would probably be helpful if you want to follow up and study further the principle of shunyata. *[Buddhist Wisdom Books* and the *Prajnaparamita in* 8,000 Lines] It seems that shunyata is on the whole one of the very important points of buddhist teaching. The ideas of impermanence, suffering, and selflessness, or egolessness, are founded in the basic environment, basic idea of shunyata.

And quite possibly we could have longer seminars at some stage. This particular seminar seems to be just purely an appetizer. [Laughter] Thank you for being very patient.

